

money; but I did not undeceive him. The long arm of my country might reach out to save me, I thought; and anyhow it was a few weeks more to live while he waited for the answer. So I wrote to his dictation, saying that if I was not ransomed he would cut off my ears and tongue and then hang me over the ravine that bordered his stronghold.

"That, alas!" he said, "is too true, Signor! I must keep my word; for the bee that never stings gets no honey. But my little pleasantry about your ears and tongue need not alarm you. I will do that afterward, not before. Rest assured that I shall treat you as a gentleman. It is the fortune of war that you are my prisoner; but it need not make us enemies."

He did, in fact, treat me well, and, so far as I could judge, had a genuine liking for me. He invited me to his table and played dominoes with me every evening, playing for small stakes and always fairly. I was allowed to go about as I pleased within certain bounds; but there were guards at all the exits on three sides of his mountain stronghold. The fourth side was a long cliff at the edge of a precipitous ravine some fifty feet wide. A huge beam hung out halfway across it. It was there they hanged those who failed to find their ransom.

I WAS looking at the beam with an uncomfortable fascination one dark evening, when a slim lad approached. He wished me good evening, and I started at the voice.

"Catrina!" I cried, and the "lad" took my hand and kissed it. It was Catrina!

"If they find you here—" I cried in horror; for certainly I would sooner have seen pretty Catrina dead than in Gurni's power.

She put my hand on something in her dress. It was a dagger. "They will not find either of us alive, Signor," she said. "We shall escape together, or together we shall die."

"If you could get in," I said, "I can get out."

She shook her head. "Not that way," she told me. "I could not climb it in the dark, and I think you could not climb it at all; but there is a way. It needs only courage and a cool head." She produced a rope about thirty feet long with a loop at the end, and I remembered the crone's prophecy that Catrina would repay one life with a ring of hemp. "The signor has courage, and the cool head is mine. It is different from the heart!" She sighed.

"The head is wiser than the heart, Catrina," I said. "I am nearly thirty, and you are sixteen, and our ways are best apart. You would risk your life for mine?"

"Of course," said Catrina simply. "But afterward it shall be as the signor's wise head says. I too know what is wise; but some hearts never listen to reason. It is not so great a risk if the signor will trust to me and shut his eyes. I shall fasten the rope on the beam. The signor must get on my back with his arms round my neck. Then I shall climb down the rope and hold to the ring, as if it were my trapeze. Then I shall swing to and fro, till I can swing far enough. There is a wide ledge on the rock on the other side. If I have judged the distance truly, I can alight there. I shall know when we have swung once or twice if we can reach it. If we cannot, we must climb up the rope again, and try to escape the way that I came, down the side of the cliff and up again; but that is harder, though the signor may not think so. To swing by the rope is easy, if the rope is long enough. The signor will keep the cool head?" She laughed faintly. "The head as cool as his heart?"

"I will keep a cool head, Catrina," I said, "for your life and mine depend on it; and as for my heart, it could warm to you easily enough; but in my country we should think you a child, and too young to win or lose a heart."

"If the signor's cool head says that I am too young, I am too young. Now we will go."

"First I must thank you, my brave little Catrina," I said; "but there are no words to thank you. You risk your life—"

"I only repay," she told me. "Come!"

WE climbed out on the end of the beam, and she made her rope fast. There was a fragment of rope there, and she fastened hers to that; for, she whispered, looking from here, she feared that her rope was too short to reach the ledge, after all. She knew the place by a white stone that she had laid upon it the night before as a guide. I could not see it; but her eyes were keener than mine.

When the rope was ready I clung to her back, and she climbed down with me, until she hung on the loop. Then she swung to and fro. I shut my eyes and listened to the creaking of the beam and the rope. I am not a coward, I hope; but I felt cold. It was a hundred feet to the bottom of the ravine.

We swung for what seemed an eternity. Then she spoke.

"I do not know if we shall reach it," she said, speaking

in gasps; "but there are lights coming along the cliff above. They have seen us. It is death if we go back. Shall I do my best?"

I put my head over my shoulder and kissed her up-turned face, as we swung to and fro over the abyss that looked deeper in the dark.

"God bless you, dear Catrina!" I said. "Yes! My dear Catrina!"

"Kiss—me—again!" she panted.

I kissed her again. Then she gave a furious swing. I opened my eyes, and saw the opposing cliff lower on us. She let go, and we flew through the air. Catrina's feet just touched the edge of the ledge, and no more. Our bodies hung backward over the abyss, and I looked upon myself as dead; but our impetus sent us forward. We were upright on the ledge. My weight was pulling us backward. Catrina threw herself sideways, and we lay just on the ledge. A shot rang out. Another and another! A bullet spattered on the rock close by. Catrina sprang to her feet and took my hand to pull me from the edge as I rose. In a moment we were sheltered from the shots by a cleft in the rock and were climbing up its side. They fired again when we reached the top and ran; but we were soon hidden in the night.

WE should have nearly half an hour's start, Catrina had told me, while the bandits crossed the ravine if they came on foot, as the path up and down was some way from their huts. If they rode mules, they had to catch them and saddle them, and go a still longer way round, so that we should have a better start still; but in that case they would gain upon us rapidly once they started, if they hit upon our track. We had nearly twenty miles to go before we got out of Gurni's district, and no one dare help us there. If they came on foot, I did not think they would overtake us; for I was a spare, athletic man, and Catrina was in training for her profession, and ran with long, easy strides like a boy. If they rode their mules, I thought there was no hope for us.

We ran for an hour without a word, and I thought we must have gone seven or eight miles. Then we came to an ascent through a mountain pass. We were out of breath and ascended at a slow walk. When we were halfway up she touched my arm and held out her hand. I listened and heard the sound of mules galloping behind. When we reached the top they were halfway up

"The heart is not so wise as the head, Signor," she told me.

"If we escape, Catrina," I said, "the heart and the head shall find a plan that they will agree upon."

"Ah, no!" she said. "I have learned that the signor's heart says differently to mine. The plans of the heart and the head are never the same. But I shall like to die for you!"

"You sha'n't die, dear!" I said fiercely. "We will escape yet! We will not wait here to be found in the morning! Let us go on. Perhaps we can get through the pass before they turn back, and hide on the other side. Anyhow, we can try."

We climbed down and went on, cautiously and more slowly. We saw the end of the pass at last, and a man waiting there on guard. He was smoking a cigarette and humming a song. We climbed up the side again and passed above him. Horsemen were scanning the level ground, and we had to wait for at least an hour, till they came back in a body to the sentinel. We could hear scraps of their conversation in the still night. We gathered that they were well satisfied that we were in the mountains, but were waiting for further orders from Gurni.

While they were talking and laughing we climbed down into the plain, not a couple of hundred yards from them, and went on; at first crawling through some fields and then running through a shady lane. The night was very dark, luckily, and they did not notice us. We were little more than halfway to safety, Catrina said.

We were exhausted by our running and climbing and made very slow progress, and soon we heard the mules coming along the lane again. We hid behind a tree, and they passed us. This time there were six of them. We heard them talking. It must have been the girl from the acrobats' troupe at St. Celeste, they said. There was no one else could have done such a feat; and Gurni had vowed that she would be the proper wife for a bandit, and he'd have her some day, anyhow. It was then I made up my mind definitely to take Catrina to my friends in England.

We followed on behind them, as if we were the pursuers. They stopped at a village of five houses, and we heard them talking to the people there. So we left the lane, and passed round the houses at the back. This took us a long detour, and when we came back to the road we were so

tired that we could scarcely put one foot before the other. We stumbled on slowly. If the bandits had followed now, I think we should scarcely have had the energy to hide; but they did not, probably thinking we were still in the mountains, and intending to cut us off in the morning. About one o'clock we found a little donkey tethered in a field. We rode on him for a couple of hours with intervals of rest. Then he lay down and refused to get up. We saw the lights of a town afar, and dragged ourselves wearily there. We met some town guards just outside. They took us in, just as the forelight of day was coming over the hills.

We were safe there, they said, for the present; but Gurni was a hard man to balk, and there were twelve miles of rough country between there and the next town, where the railway station was. We should be wise to get away before he knew we had reached their town. We took their advice and hired two mules and went on, escorted by a guard. We had breakfast at the railway station and took the morning train to Madrid. In the train we both fell asleep. We were at Madrid before I even thanked Catrina properly.

I THANK you with all my heart, little one," I said, "and with all my head. And my cool head and my warm heart have made a plan. Annette said that you owed me two lives and you would pay both, one with a ring of hemp and one with a golden ring. Well, little girl, you have paid one. You shall come to England and live with my sister and grow into a woman, and when you are older I think you will pay the other life with a wedding ring, my sweet little Catrina!"

She caught her breath and looked in my eyes. "That would not be paying a life, but taking it," she told me.

"It is I who would take, Catrina," I protested.

"Never," she said, "unless you love me. Ah, no! Never, Signor!"

I took both her hands. "You love me, Catrina?" I asked.

"You know!" she cried.

"I know," I said. "Catrina, I will tell you a secret. In my country they will think you a child and they would laugh at the idea of my loving you; but I do! That is our secret, Catrina."

And then I kissed her; and the next day we set out for England. And I took Catrina to my sister, and when I had told my sister took Catrina in her arms and loved her from that moment till now.

That was two years ago. Since then Catrina has won all our hearts. She has learned and unlearned, grown stately and demure, and remained the same sweet loving girl all the time. Next week she will pay the second life, when I claim her with a little golden ring.



We Took Their Advice, and Hired Two Mules, and Went on.

the ascent. We went a little way into the defile. Then Catrina motioned me to climb the rocky side. We crouched behind a bush while the bandits rode by below. There were ten of them. I recognized Gurni among them. Others would have gone through the passes to the right and the left, she said. There were only three ways that we could go. In the morning they would set all the country to look for us, and we must expect no help from the country people. They would certainly betray us.

"But we still have the dagger," she told me bravely.

"Oh, Catrina!" I said. "And you knew all this risk! And you came!"